DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 182 527 CE 024 088

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TITLE Perceptions of the Preparation of Youth for Work: Report of a Three-State Survey.
INSTITUTION Research for Better Schools, Inc., Philadelphia, Pa.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 22p.: For a related document see CE 024 089

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills: Career Education: Communication Skills: Education Work Relationship: Employee Attitudes: *Employer Attitudes: Employment: Employment Experience: *Employment Qualifications: Individual Characteristics: *Job Skills: Job Training: Personnel Evaluation: Questionnaires: Surveys: *Work Attitudes: Work Experience: Young Adults: *Youth
IDENTIFIERS Delaware: New Jersey: Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A survey of employers in Delaware, New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania provided (1) information on organizational characteristics, employers' perception of the relative importance of nine previously identified successful transition skills, and their perception of the deficiency of these skills in today's employed youth; and (2) a model procedure for schools to use or adapt in conducting similar surveys on a local level. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to 178 members of twenty-seven local service clubs (Exchange, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary) to collect data for the following concerns: the employee attribute most important to employers in general; relative importance of previous job experience and personal attributes; degree of agreement among employers in different types of organizations on important attributes and value of experience; attributes in which youth are found to be most deficient; and differing estimates among employers in different types of organizations of the proportion of deficient youth. Employers agreed that young workers were most deficient in those attributes they considered most important despite an emphasis on those attributes in the schools. The finding that employers view the possession of the successful transition skills as more important than previous work experience argues strongly for career education programs. (YLB)

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREPARATION OF YOUTH FOR WORK:

REPORT OF A THREE-STATE SURVEY

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The preparation of this report was supported by funds from the National Institute of Education, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NIE, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Perceptions of the Preparation of Youth for Work:
Report of a Three-State Survey

Recent developments such as automation of production, job specialization, expansion of the number of young people in a shrinking job market, acceleration of technological change, and uncertainty of economic growth have all played a role in bringing the problems of youth transition from school to work into the national limelight. It is clear that the transition from the role of student to that of worker is becoming increasingly difficult: the youth unemployment rate has risen from 12.2% in 1969 to 19.0% in 1977.[1]

One of the problems, simply stated, is that young people are not prepared to enter the world of work:

- many youth think about careers for the first time after they graduate from high school.
- much of what is learned in the classroom has little to do with what is happening outside of the classroom.
- a large proportion of high school students are enrolled in college preparatory courses even though many graduates will be going to work and not to college.

In a recent U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare publication, Barry Stern states:

> The successful transition of too many young people from school to work has been impeded by: (1) Their lack of knowledge of the world of work; (2) their lack of knowledge of their own abilities, which might be useful in selecting an appropriate career; (3) their early socialization into delimited occupational roles because of sex, race, or social class; (4) the nonnegotiability of certificates or diplomas received in school to use when applying for a job or entrance into postsecondary education; (5) their lack of jobseeking skills and help from institutions in finding work; and (6) their lack of marketable skills, i.e., specific occupational skills and/or the work habits and basic skills needed to learn on one's own.[2]

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One of the movements aimed at overcoming some of the above-mentioned impediments is career education. Sidney P. Marland, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, is generally given credit for bringing the impetus for the career education movement. Early in the movement, under the direction of the U.S. Office of Education and the National Institute of Education, Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS), a private, non-profit educational laboratory, began developing a career education program which made use of community as well as school resources to help ease the transition from school to the work environment. This program has been implemented successfully with RBS assistance in high schools throughout the country. Helping schools implement career education programs has convinced RBS that the adaptation of educational programs for local use is of more value than the adoption of complete program packages developed elsewhere. There seems to be nc one type of career education program that will succeed in all local contexts.

In order to adapt or design a career education program to fit within a local context, schools need to know what local employers expect from new employees and how they feel about the present preparation of students for entering the world of work.

In May, 1978, Research for Better Schools, Inc. (RBS) submitted to the National Institute of Education a paper titled "Employer Attitudes Toward the Preparation of Young People for Work: Building a Research Agenda." This paper synthesized the results of eleven earlier studies[3] of employer attitudes and listed the employers' perceived deficiencies in the job performance of young people. The paper described an apparent consensus among employers concerning the deficiencies young people must overcome if they are

to accomplish smooth transitions between education and work. Problems seem to center around nine areas:

- basic academic skills
- communications skills
- knowledge of the world of work
- interaction with fellow workers
- interaction with superiors
- positive attitudes toward work and the workplace
- dependability
- craftsmanship
- productivity.

While other studies have identified the above nine areas, hereinafter called the Successful Transition Skills, little has been done to examine (a) the extent of the perceived deficiencies in these attributes, (b) the relative importance of the areas of deficiency, and (c) whether experience is as important as the possession of the "right qualities" by young employees. Information about these three areas would be useful to schools planning a career education program because it would (a) help document a need for career education and (b) assist in the development and ranking of program goals and (c) contribute to the planning for specific student outcomes.

RBS decided to do a regional survey of employers in Delaware, New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania to (a) serve the information needs outlined above, and (b) provide a model procedure for schools to use or adapt in conducting similar surveys on a local level.

Method

A questionnaire was developed (see Appendix) which asked representatives of employing organizations to provide data on the characteristics of their organization, their perception of the relative importance of the Successful Transition Skills, and their perception of the deficiency of these skills in today's employed youth.

Data were collected from twenty-seven local service clubs (Exchange, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary) in Delaware, New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania. RBS tried to obtain clubs serving communities in each of the U.S. Census categories in each of the three states. The locations of the various clubs are given below:

Delaware

Brandywine
Dover
Millsboro
Newark
Wilmington (suburbs)

New Jersey

Atlantic City (three clubs)
Hammonton
Newark
Paterson
Surf City
Vineland
Williamstown

Eastern Pennsylvania

Chester
Coatesville
Holmes
Lebanon (two clubs)
Paoli
Parksburg
Pottstown
Reading (two clubs)
Scranton (two clubs)
Upper Darby

Clubs serving the identified communities were located through local Chambers of Commerce. Direct contact with these clubs was made, and approval of the survey by District Governors of the clubs was obtained when required.

At regular meetings of the service clubs, RBS researchers discussed career education, explained the purpose of the study, and distributed the survey questionnaire to all members in attendance. Sometimes the researchers showed a slide/tape called "Experience Based Career Education" (produced by RBS). Members were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it, anonymously, to RBS. A business reply mailing envelope was provided for that purpose.

The above procedure was followed in all but two of the listed service clubs. In the Coatesville and Parksburg, Pennsylvania clubs, the questionnaires were given to the club presidents for distribution.

Data analysis was kept as simple as possible. Frequency distributions were obtained for response alternatives on the items in the questionnaire to determine demographic characteristics and overall employer perceptions. Contingency analysis was used to detect the existence of relationships between categorical variables. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine relationships between continuous variables.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, RBS staff wanted to learn about experiences and perceptions of employers in various types of communities in the region. In deciding to use service clubs as the means for reaching respondents, participation in the study was limited to clubs whose leadership could be persuaded to support RBS' efforts.

Second, in deciding to approach service clubs, RBS staff limited the respondent population to active service club members. As a result, few women and black respondents had opportunities to participate in the study.

Third, in deciding to encourage the service club to distribute questionnaires to members, it became possible to obtain more than one completed questionnaire per employer. This weakens the assumption of independence of observation which is required to conduct the statistical tests used to ferret out relationships.

Fourth, in deciding to respect anonymity of respondents and their organizations, there is no way to match respondent characteristics with those of the general population of employers.

Results and Discussion

Respondents and Their Organizations

Responses were received from 178 individuals: 28 from Delaware, 59 from New Jersey, and 91 from Pennsylvania. Of the 178 respondents, 48% represented organizations located in urban areas, 33% in suburban areas, 13% in rural areas, and 6% in "other" areas. The employers represented several types of organizations: 75% were from private industry or business, 6% were practicing professionals, 6% represented public employers, 5% were from social agencies, 3% were from educational agencies, 1% represented religious agencies, and 3% listed themselves as from other kinds of companies.

The respondents represented a number of management positions. The five most frequently occurring titles of those responding were president (20%), vice-president (18%), manager (16%), owner (11%), and director (9%).

Twenty-five employers were principally involved in production, 53 in sales, 76 in service, 10 in health care, and 10 in "other functions." Four respondents did not list the type of work in which their organizations engaged.

For all employers, the median percentage of employees between 16 and 21 years of age was less than ten. The majority of 16 to 21 year old workers in the companies of 86 of the respondents were full-time employees. Further, a majority of young workers in the companies of 93 respondents were permanent, as opposed to temporary, employees.

One hundred thirty respondents described the type of work done by a majority of the young employees in their organizations. These were:

Type of Work	Number
Unskilled manual labor	35
Skilled manual labor	26
Office/clerical work	46
Sales	7
Professional trainee	8
Professional work	3
Other	5
Total	130

Research Questions

The answers to five research questions were sought in the analysis of the data. These questions, along with the data, are presented below.

What employee attributes seem to be most important to employers in general?

One hundred seventeen of the 178 respondents had recent experience with young workers. These individuals were asked to review the list of Successful Transition Skills and to select the five they felt were most important for employees between the ages of 16 and 21. The results are tabulated below; different numbers of respondents for each skill reflect incomplete responses by some individuals.

	One of the Top 5 in Importance?	
	Yes	No
1. Positive Attitude	98 (86.0%)	16 (14.0%)
2. Dependability	98 (85.2%)	17 (14.8%)
3. Communications Skills	84 (73.7%)	30 (26.3%)
4. Basic Academic Skills	81 (73.6%)	29 (26.4%)
5. Interaction with Fellow Workers	63 (56.3%)	49 (43.8%)
6. Craftsmanship	46 (41.4%)	65 (58.6%)
7. Interaction with Superiors	38 (34.2%)	73 (65.8%)
8. Productivity	38 (33.9%)	74 (66.1%)
9. Knowledge of the World of Work	28 (25.0%)	84 (75.0%)

Table 1

Employer Perception of Importance of Successful Transition Skills

Positive Attitude, which was defined for the respondents as "concern for the organization and its products; positive approach to tasks assigned," and Dependability, defined as "good attendance and punctuality; the acceptance of responsibility; accountability," were seen by the employers to be by far the most important attributes. Two others, both about equally important, followed as the third and fourth choices. These were Communications Skills and Basic Academic Skills. The fifth-ranked attribute was Interaction with Fellow Workers. The remaining four attributes were seen to be of significantly ($\alpha = .05$) lesser importance than the top five.

Is previous job experience more or less important than personal attributes?

One hundred fifteen respondents judged the relative value of previous work experience. The overwhelming majority (72.6%) of those responding indicated that possession of the Successful Transition Skills by young workers was of more importance than previous work experience. Only 2.6% felt that experience was more important than the nine attributes. The rest (25.8%) felt that, for them, possession of the attributes was about equally as important as having previous work experience.

Do employers in different types of organizations agree about which attributes are important and on the value of experience?

Responses to the question asking for the five most important Successful Transition Skills were examined by type of employer organization: production, sales, service, and "other functions". Health care organizations were not considered since only two of these respondents judged the relative value of the various skills. No significant differences ($\alpha = .05$) were noted for the different types of organizations on any of the nine attributes. The results are shown in Table 2.

	Percent of respondents in various types of organizations for whom skill is in top 5 in importance			
	n = 15 Production	n = 33 Sales	n = 54 Service	n = 5 Other
1. Positive Attitude	93.3	88.2	82.6	80.0
2. Communication Skills	78.6	75.8	69.6	83.3
3. Dependability	78.6	86.1	83.6	100.0
4. Basic Academic Skills	64.3	81.3	69.8	83.3
5. Interaction with Fellow Workers	64.3	51.5	56.4	60.0
6. Productivity	42.9	35.3	29.6	20.0
7. Knowledge of the World of Work	33.3	18.2	27.8	20.0
8. Interaction With Superiors	28.6	36.4	37.0	40.0
9. Craftsmanship	21.4	41.2	50.9	20.0

Table 2

Employer Perception of Importance
of Transition Skills, by Type of Organization

With respect to the relative value of the Successful Transition Skills and previous work experience, there is no significant difference ($\alpha = .05$) between views expressed by employers in production, sales, service, and health care and "other functions". For analysis, the health care and "other categories were combined. The majority of each group held the opinion that possession of requisite attributes is more important than previous work experience, as shown in Table 3.

	Is Experience More, Equally, or Less Important Than Possessing Successful Transition Skills?	
	Experience is Less Important than Skills	Experience is Equally Important or More Important than Skills
Production	14 (82%)	3 (18%)
Sales	30 (81%)	7 (19%)
Service	35 (64%)	20 (36%)
Health Care and Other	4 (67%)	2 (33%)
Total	83 (72%)	32 (28%)

Table 3

Comparison of Importance of Experience and Successful Transition Skills, by Company Type ($\chi^2 = 4.43$, df = 3)

What are the attributes in which employers find youth to be most deficient?

This question was approached in two ways on the survey questionnaire. First, like the importance dimension, respondents who had recent experience with young employees were asked to review the list of Successful Transition Skills and indicate, by check-mark, the five they felt were most deficient in young people. Later in the questionnaire, the same respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of young employees that experienced observable difficulty on each of the nine transition skills. The skills were then ranked according to both selection criteria. These rankings appear on the following page.

	Rank as an Area of Deficiency	
	By Check-mark	By Percent Estimation
1. Dependability	1	3
2. Communications Skills	2	5
3. Positive Attitude	3	2
4. Basic Academic Skills	4	7
5. Knowledge of the World of Work	5	1
6. Productivity	6	4
7. Craftsmanship	7	6
8. Interaction With Superiors	8	8
9. Interaction With Fellow Workers	9	9

Table 4

Rankings of Employer Perceptions of Deficiencies in Successful Transition Skills

As they stand, the rank-order correlation between the deficiency ratings obtained by the two methods does not represent agreement. One area of major discrepancy is noted: Knowledge of the World of Work. If this dimension were to be removed, and the ranks adjusted, the correlation between the adjusted ranks becomes 0.79.

In order to arrive at a single ranking of the Successful Transition Skills in order of the magnitude of perceived deficiency among young people, the two adjusted ranks (check-mark and percent estimation) were averaged. The Successful Transition Skills appear below with the mean-rank of perceived deficiency:

Dependability	1.5
Positive Attitude	2
Communications Skills	3

Productivity	4
Basic Academic Skills	5
Craftsmanship	5.5
Interaction With Superiors	7
Interaction With Fellow Workers	8

The three Successful Transition Skills which are seen by employers to be most lacking in today's youth are the very skills which the employers see to be most important: Dependability, Positive Attitude, and Communications Skills.

Do employers in different types of organizations, hiring and working with different ages and numbers of young people, differ in their estimates of the proportion of deficient youth?

Estimates of respondents' perceptions of the proportion of their young employees who are deficient in each of nine Successful Transition Skills were cross-tabulated in two ways; first with employer type (production, sales, service, health care, other) and secondly, with the age range (16-18, 19-21) of the majority of young workers with whom the respondent had supervisory contact.

No significant difference ($\alpha = .05$) was found among employers engaged in various endeavors on the degree to which young employees are deficient in any of the nine Successful Transition Skills. Likewise, with respect to the age range of young workers, no significant differences were observed ($\alpha = .05$) between employers in the two groups on their perceptions of the degree of deficiency of young employees on any of the nine transition skills.

Finally, for each of the nine skills, correlation coefficients were calculated between the employers' perception of the degree of deficiency of young employees and the number of young employees with whom the employers had had contact over the past five years. None of these coefficients was

significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level of significance: those with limited experience with young employees tend to agree with those whose experience is broad in judging the deficiencies of young employees.

Conclusions

Employers agree that young workers are most deficient in precisely those attributes which they see to be most important: Positive Attitude, Dependability, and Communications Skills. This fact would seem to argue for an emphasis on these qualities and skills in schools. But there is no need for argument, since schools already view these three qualities as goals of education. Punctuality, good attendance and accountability are basic values of schooling and the promotion of positive attitudes toward school and schoolwork pervades each classroom. The development of positive attitudes and dispositions is done with the expectation that the qualities will be replicated in a wide range of life activities beyond the school,[4] e.g., work. Communication skills are not only the substance of much class work but also the vehicle through which instruction proceeds. The issue raised by the findings, then, is why there is such a broad discrepancy between these school goals and outcomes.

Perhaps one of the major contributors to the discrepancy and thus to the apparent failure of our schools to prepare young people for work is the school context itself. The nature of schooling is such that it relies upon its own continuing system of rewards and punishments to accomplish its ends; it tends to be a closed system.

A more open learning environment that includes out-of-classroom activities, interaction between employers and teachers, school sponsored work experiences, and career related instruction throughout the curriculum can broaden the school context and assist in the school-work transition in a number of ways. First, it can extend the reward system of the school into an area that may have a more direct influence on the student. Work is not only something that one does to make a living; it is also an area of endeavor in which there is an immediate relationship between what one does and the results of one's effort.

By broadening the learning environment to include the larger community, schools also can increase the pool of role models to whom young people can relate. The school can monitor and organize experiences so that students progress through a program dealing with many adults who may, in some instances, fill gaps left by family, community and school.

Experience can also underscore the relevance of school values. The value placed on punctuality and good attendance on the job may give new meaning to the value the student sees placed on them in school. The reading of machine instructions or new safety regulations may have greater personal relevance to the student than do more typical reading lessons and assignments. The values of the workplace and the values of the school may remain detached in the consciousness of many young people until a strong attempt is made by schools to connect the two. Employers view the possession of the Successful Transition Skills to be more important than previous work experience. This finding argues strongly for career education programs in schools. Students who enter the world of work with the appropriate transition skills will not only be employable, but also appear to have even a

greater likelihood of being employed than job-seekers with previous work experience. In fact, the present value attached to previous employment experience may simply be its value as an indicator of the possession of requisite employability skills.

Employers do not perceive a difference in the Successful Transition Skill deficiencies of younger (16-18 years old) and older (19-21 years old) workers. This raises the question of the effectiveness of the final years of schooling in developing the Successful Transition Skills in young people. Thus, the schools, especially during the later secondary years, not only need to increase their holding power for youth, but also need to provide experiences that make school attendance worthwhile in terms of smoothing the transition from school to work.

The planning of broader career related experiences for young people must obviously include representatives from the business-industry-labor community. The findings of this study suggest that this planning effort could include representatives from any size or type of organization: there is remarkable agreement throughout the work community about the attributes desired from young workers. The schools, therefore, in approaching various companies, need not be concerned that different kinds of employers have different expectations for their young workers. Once establishing career education needs in concert with the business-industry-labor community, schools must respond by graduating young people who can meet these needs.

Footnotes

[1]U.S. Department of Labor. Handbook of Labor Statistics 1977. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977, p.114.

[2]Stern, Barry. Toward a Federal Policy on Education and Work. Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977, p.17.

[3]The eleven studies studies examined were:

Advisory Council for Technical-Vocational Education in Texas. Qualities Employers Like, Dislike in Job Applicants: Final Report of Statewide Employer Survey. Austin, TX: Advisory Council for Technical-Vocational Education in Texas, 1975.

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[4]Broudy, H.S., et al Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1964.

Acknowledgment

The author wishes to thank Mr. Jesse Turner for his assistance in the collection of data for this study as well as Dr. Janice Kruse and Mr. Michael Simeone for their contributions to the development of the final report.

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Research for Better Schools, Inc.

CAREER EDUCATION SURVEY

Research for Better Schools (RBS) is a Philadelphia-based educational research and development laboratory. We are conducting a survey of (a) the kinds of resources that various types of community organizations and businesses might be willing to share with schools, and (b) opinions about the adequacy of the current preparation of young people, ages 16 through 21, for work. RBS will use the information you provide to help schools more effectively prepare young people to enter the world of work.

Please complete this questionnaire and return it in the attached envelope anonymously to RBS. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

If your company, firm, or place of employment has more than one location, please consider *only your location, branch, or division* as you answer these questions.

Please answer the following questions about your company, firm, or place of employment by checking or filling-in the appropriate responses.

How would you describe your company or place of employment?

( ) An educational agency
( ) A public (i.e., governmental) agency
( ) A religious agency
( ) A social agency
( ) A business or industry
( ) Other (please specify: _____)

What is the primary function of your company or firm?

( ) Production
( ) Sales
( ) Service
( ) Health care
( ) Other (please specify: _____)

How would you describe the location of your company or firm?

( ) Downtown business district
( ) Urban industrial area
( ) Suburban business area
( ) Suburban industrial park
( ) Rural area
( ) Other (please describe: _____)

Approximately *how many people* are employed full-time by your company or firm? _____

Approximately what percentage of the employees of your company or firm are between the ages of 16 and 21?

( ) 0%	( ) 21% to 30%	( ) 51% to 60%	( ) 81% to 90%
( ) 1% to 10%	( ) 31% to 40%	( ) 61% to 70%	( ) 91% to 99%
( ) 11% to 20%	( ) 41% to 50%	( ) 71% to 80%	( ) 100%

Are the majority of your 16 to 21-year-old workers employed *full-time*?

( ) Yes ( ) No

Are the majority of your 16 to 21-year-old workers *permanent* (as opposed to temporary) employees?

( ) Yes ( ) No

How would you describe the *type of work* done by the majority of your company's 16 to 21-year-old employees?

( ) Unskilled manual labor
( ) Skilled manual labor
( ) Office/clerical work
( ) Sales
( ) Professional trainee
( ) Professional work
( ) Other (please describe: _____)

Over the past five (5) years, with approximately how many employees between the ages of 16 and 21 have you come in contact? _____

Which age group represents the majority of these young people? ( ) 16-18 ( ) 19-21

There are certain attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors which, if *lacking* in young employees, seem to be sources of employment problems. Some of these attributes are listed and described below. Please check (✓) the line to the *left* of the five (5) attributes which you feel are MOST IMPORTANT for employees between the ages of 16 and 21 to possess. Then check (✓) the line to the *right* of the five (5) attributes which you feel are those in which employees between the ages of 16 and 21 are MOST DEFICIENT.

FIVE MOST IMPORTANT (checks)		FIVE MOST DEFICIENT (checks)
_____	BASIC ACADEMIC SKILLS: The mathematics and English skills necessary for tasks such as filling out a job application, conducting routine correspondence, monitoring inventories, etc.	_____
_____	COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS: The skills required to understand and give instructions, describe problems, express oneself clearly in writing, etc.	_____
_____	KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD OF WORK: Understanding the nature of work; the role requirements imposed by work; the idea of collective bargaining, fringe benefits, seniority system, etc.	_____
_____	INTERACTION WITH FELLOW WORKERS: The ability to get along and act in concert with one's peers	_____
_____	INTERACTION WITH SUPERIORS: The ability to recognize and accept the existing chain of command	_____
_____	POSITIVE ATTITUDE: Concern for the organization and its products; positive approach to tasks assigned	_____
_____	CRAFTSMANSHIP: The quality and accuracy of work produced	_____
_____	DEPENDABILITY: Good attendance and punctuality; the acceptance of responsibility; accountability	_____
_____	PRODUCTIVITY: The speed and quantity of work produced	_____

Now, please compare the importance of *PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE* to the above attributes by checking the statement below which best reflects your opinion:

( ) Experience is less important than most of the attributes listed above.

( ) Experience is about equally important as most of the attributes listed above.

( ) Experience is more important than most of the attributes listed above.

Consider *all* the young employees (ages 16-21) with whom you have had contact in the past five (5) years. Please estimate the percentage of these young employees who have had observable difficulty in each of the areas. Indicate your answer by placing a check (✓) in the box which corresponds to your estimate.

	Percentage of Young Employees Experiencing Noticeable Difficulty with this Area											
	0%	1%-10%	11%-20%	21%-30%	31%-40%	41%-50%	51%-60%	61%-70%	71%-80%	81%-90%	91%-99%	100%
Basic Academic Skills												
Communication Skills												
Knowledge of the World of Work												
Interaction with Fellow Workers												
Interaction with Superiors												
Positive Attitude												
Craftsmanship												
Dependability												
Productivity												